Dragonshards
The Last War
By Keith Baker

The stormship dropped from the night sky. The sleek longboat's black hull was almost invisible from the ground. A ring of elemental air held the ship aloft, only revealed when lightning flashed around the ring. A roll of thunder heralded the arrival of the warship, and a wave of arrows rained down upon the Cyran army. Sorcerous blasts of fire shattered the battlefield, killing friend and enemy alike. Within minutes, hundreds of soldiers were dead, and the tide of battle had been irrevocably altered.

The kingdom of Galifar ruled the continent of Khorvaire for almost 900 years. This peace was far from perfect. The western coast was a haven for all manner of beasts and monsters. Hostile goblins and kobolds lurked in the high mountains. Lhazaar lords sought profit on the seas. Occasionally a prince of Galifar would turn against tradition and fight the laws of succession. Such rebellions were rare, however, and the royal family always managed to put aside its differences in the face of these would-be usurpers.

That was the situation in the kingdom for 894 years.

Why, at that point, did three of Jarot's heirs turn against centuries of tradition? Perhaps it was merely a matter of time. Since the founding of the Kingdom, the five nations had grown apart, with national pride and identity growing more pronounced with each century. Maybe it was an unfortunate conflict of strong personalities. Thalin of Thrane saw a chance to spread his faith; Kaius of Karrnath believed his sister lacked the strength to hold the throne; Wroann of Breland had long been an agent of change. All three may have acted on their own accord ... but perhaps they were the pawns of darker forces with a vested interest in the fall of Galifar. The Dreaming Dark has always used discord as a weapon. The Lords of Dust love chaos in all forms, and the Blood of Vol surely saw war as a way to increase its power in Karrnath. The full truth may never be known but the results are plain to see.

The conflict lasted far longer than the lives of the rulers that began it. Over the course of 102 years, the tides of war rose and fell. Alliances formed and collapsed. Nations were torn apart by civil strife and betrayal as Valenar, Darguun, and the Eldeen Reaches were born. Truces all were temporary, and never was there a time when all five nations were at peace; sooner or later the old conflicts would flare up again from the glowing coals of resentment. Only the utter destruction of Cyre brought all combatants to the table. In 996, the twelve nations of Khorvaire were recognized by the Treaty of Thronehold, and the Last War officially came to an end.

War in the World

The Last War is a central element of the **Eberron**Campaign Setting. The war lasted more than a century and it has been over for less than two years. Future Dragonshard articles will focus on specific aspects of the conflict: famous battles, legendary heroes, and the techniques of warfare developed in the last days of Galifar. For now, here are a few brief ideas for tying the theme of the war into your Eberron campaign.

War Torn Lands

A century of war has taken its toll on Khorvaire. Any time a party travels near the borders of nations -- the old front lines -- the signs of conflict should be easy to see. Burnt-out villages are choked with ashes and weeds. Shattered bridges lay in heaps. Conductor stones that were torn out of the ground prevent use of the lightning rail. Magical scorch marks scar the earth. In larger communities, there may be signs of occupation or sorcerous attack. Bands of refugees seeking to rebuild their lives clog the roads or barely survive in squalid camps. Think about ways to drive this point home. Instead of a cheerful inn, the party may come upon a charred shell of a tavern, home to a ragged band of peasants who have turned to banditry to survive. Such brigands are no match for the adventurers, but is there any victory to be had from fighting them?

The largest monument to the war is the Mournland, which is now one vast dungeon. Its ruins are recent rather than ancient but it is still filled with the treasures of a nation, guarded by strange monsters and terrible magic.

Psychological Scars

The psychological effects of the war are more pervasive than the physical damage and can be felt across the continent. A general aura of pessimism grips the population. Beyond the horror of the war, the Mournland casts a pall across the psyche of Khorvaire. No one knows what caused the terrible destruction or even whether it could strike again. Some Khyber cults and druid sects believe the Mournland is the first sign of a coming apocalypse. This fear is coupled with suspicion and anger. King Kaius's signature on the Treaty of Thronehold means nothing to the former Karrn soldier whose family was slaughtered during a Thrane offensive. The people of Thrane hate Karrnath with a passion. Aundair has never forgiven the Eldeen Reaches. No one trusts the Valenar. A former soldier who advertises his allegiance may receive Hostile or Unfriendly reactions in enemy nations but there may be smaller touches as well. Perhaps the innkeeper lost his only daughter in the battle of Keldan Ridge, and he wants the Karrnish fighter in the party to remember her name. Revenge and greed can motivate many adventures, as the party investigates the murder of a former general or searches for weapon caches hidden on the border of the Mournland.

Conspiracies

The destruction of Galifar created an immense power vacuum across Khorvaire. Some seek to seize this power, while others long for a sense of security that no longer flows from the crown. As a result, the influence of cults and conspiracies has grown tremendously. Even a seemingly simple village may harbor a cult of the Dragon Below or a cell of the Emerald Claw, while a town may contain a half-dozen competing factions. The campaign setting book describes a number of influential organizations but these are merely the beginning. Others could form around religious beliefs, military service, or shared blood. Royal courts are full of political intrigue. These organizations are spread much wider than people expect; everyone is looking for something to hold onto, and even the smallest thorp may be home to a secret society.

Personal Experience

When creating a party, players should think about how the war affected their characters. Did they fight; if so, who for? Did they lose family and friends? Shared military experience can be a strong basis for an adventuring party, especially if the PCs fought for the nation of Cyre, which no longer exists. If you follow this path, you might consider running your first adventure as a "flashback" to the war. Playing out a particularly interesting or disturbing military mission can clearly establish the effect of the war on the world and set up allies or enemies that can appear in future adventures. This also allows PCs to enter the post-

war world with a little experience under their belts.

The Mother of Invention

The warforged, the airship, undead troops, and the eternal wand were all developed as weapons of war, and these are only the beginning. Future articles will explore magical warfare in more detail; until then, enlarge upon your own ideas for weapons or spells that were developed for battle. What was House Cannith working on in its hidden think tanks in the Mournland? What terrible secrets are waiting to be discovered?

These are just a few examples of the impact of the war. As you develop adventures or character backgrounds, take a moment to think about how the war can be woven into your story!

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